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DESIGN SENSE 15

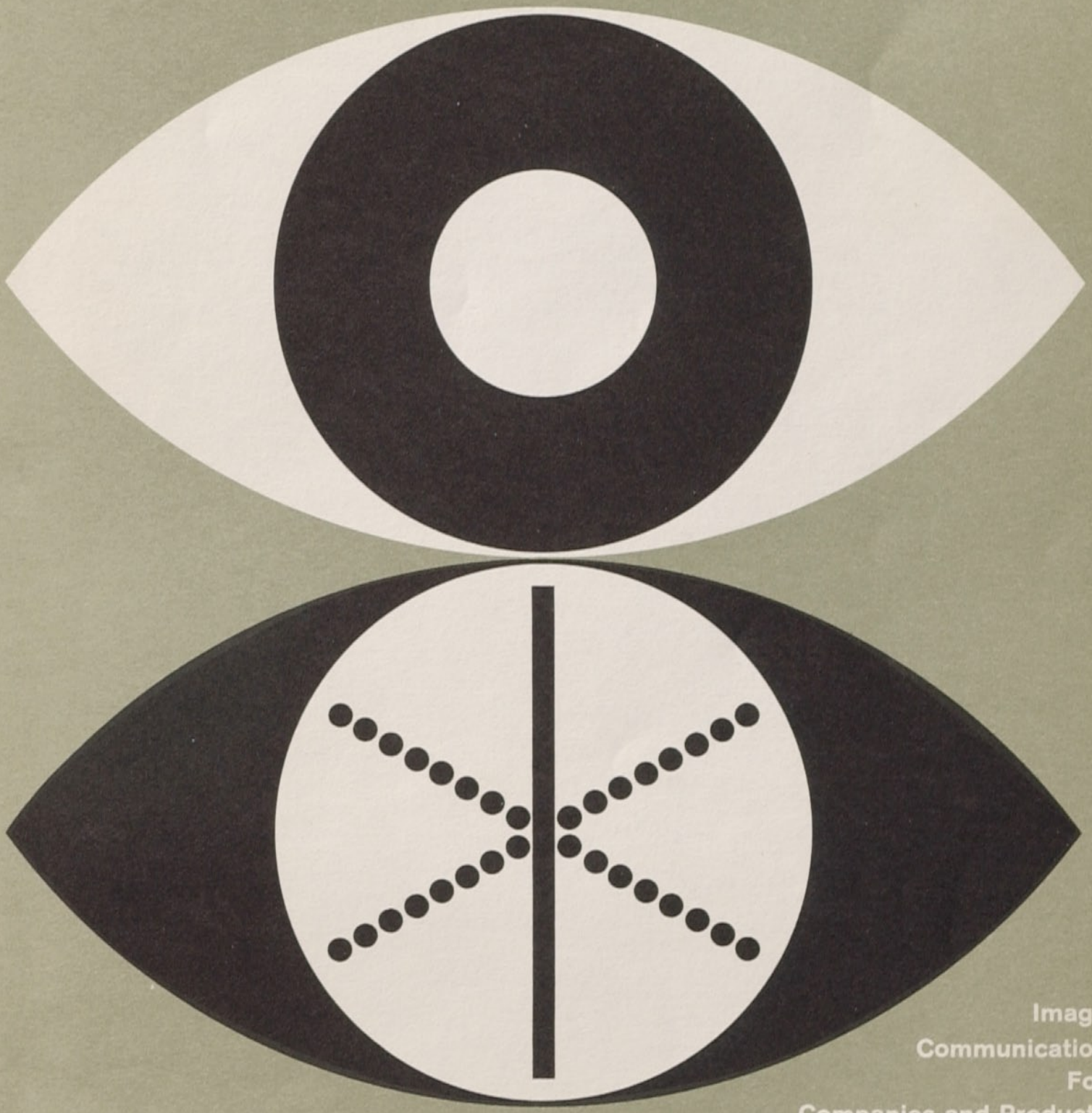

Image
Communication
For
Companies and Products

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Industrial Designers
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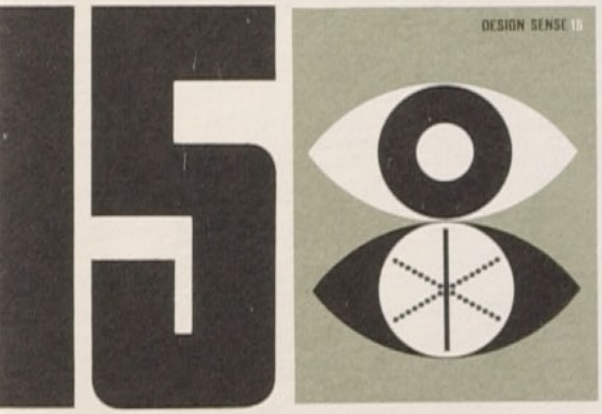

A publication
on design as it affects
marketing, merchandising,
package and
product planning, research
and store planning.
Lippincott and Margulies, Inc.
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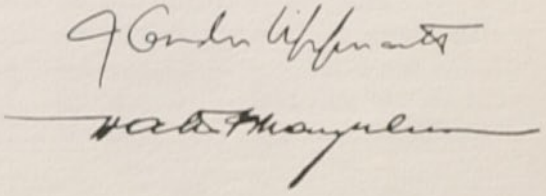
A NEW LOOK AT IMAGE COMMUNICATION

Last spring's double-barrelled shot at the subject of Corporate Identity (DESIGN SENSE 13 and 14) discussed the "Image" as an instrument of corporate policy, and the role of design in helping to create a cohesive Corporate Identity System.

In the process, we sidestepped the question, how does design communicate? This is not just an idle query, like asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. For unless we know how an idea, or an image — or a sales message, for that matter — gets from one person to another, we can very easily end up talking to ourselves.

Needless to say, we cannot begin to plumb the depths of "Communication" in these few pages. Nor can we match the performance of the psychologists, behavioral scientists and others who have already produced a raft of scholarly literature on the subject — most of it, unfortunately, filled with such wonderfully non-communicating words as "congeries of circumstances," "labyrinthical regulators," and so on.

But what we can do in this issue of DESIGN SENSE is to discuss, in words of as few syllables as possible, how a corporate or product image is communicated, and show how good design can help increase the effectiveness of your image communications.



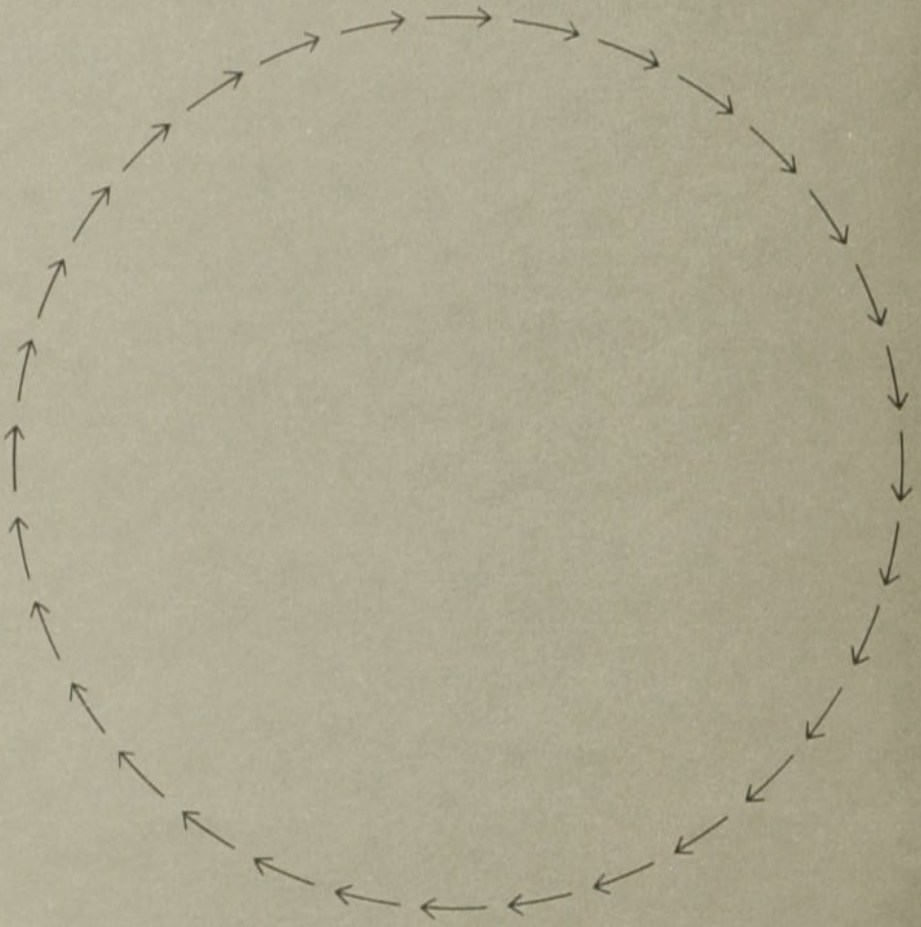
person to another. On the preceding page is a diagram which may help point out the danger spots and the problem areas.

IDEAS FORM THE FOUNDATION

Starting point in any communications system is an idea which you want someone else to understand *and react to*. In this case, because we are talking about product marketing, the idea is a product idea which you want your customers to "buy." In the Hathaway shirt example, the product idea was "quality shirt." For a bread toaster, the idea might be "even toasting," or "rapid toasting," or "keeps your toast warm." For a breakfast food, the product ideas might be "high energy", or "new taste sensation", or simply "fun to eat."

Whatever the product idea is, it had better be a good one. Which means that it had better take into consideration the subconscious needs and desires of your customers and not attempt to push something down their collective throats. Not that the latter can't be done — the U.S. public accepted automobile "tail fins" over their dead bodies — but generally speaking, it is easier and safer to go with the tide than against it.

In this never-never land there are precious few road maps to tell you what idea will go — and when. Who could have foretold, for example, the fabulous though short-lived success of the hula hoop? Or who could have predicted five years ago that a set of miniature plastic bones which could be glued together to form the skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus would have an almost irresistable appeal to today's sub-teen set? The best advice we can give is the classic, "Know Your Customer." Know how he lives, how he thinks, what his hopes are, what his fears are, what he *says* he wants, and — more important — what he *really* wants. In this field, the insights furnished by sociologists and anthropologists can frequently be worth their weight in gold.



The man in the Hathaway shirt

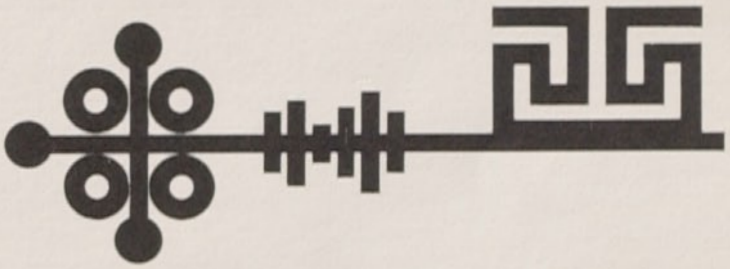
AMERICAN MEN are beginning to realize that it is ridiculous to buy good suits and then spoil the effect by wearing an ordinary, mass-produced shirt. Hence the growing popularity of HATHAWAY shirts, which are in a class by themselves.

HATHAWAY shirts now subtend longer collar points. They make you look younger and more distinguished, because of the subtly new HATHAWAY collars. The whole shirt is tailored more generously, and is therefore more comfortable. The tails are longer, and stay in your trousers. The buttons are mother-of-pearl. Even the stitching has an unhurried elegance about it.

Above all, HATHAWAY make their shirts of remarkable fabrics, collected from the four corners of the earth—Viyella and Aertex from England, woollen tweeds from Scotland, Sea Island cotton from the West Indies, hand-woven madras from India, broadcloth from Manchester, linen sateen from Paris, hand-blocked silks from England, exclusive cottons from the best weavers in America. You will get a great deal of quiet satisfaction out of wearing shirts which are in such impeccable taste.

HATHAWAY shirts are made by a small company of dedicated craftsmen in the little town of Waterville, Maine. They have been at it, man and boy, for one hundred and fifteen years.

At better stores everywhere, or write C. F. HATHAWAY, Waterville, Maine, for the name of your nearest one. In New York, telephone MU 9-4141. Prices from $5.95 to $15.00.



IMAGERY IS THE KEY

Assuming the product idea has all the external earmarks of being a good one, the next step in communication is to develop the imagery which will convey it most powerfully. In advertising, this might be called the "copy theme." In marketing, it might be called the "sales strategy." In package and product design it is called the "Brandmark" (a term coined by L&M), and it means the way in which color, form, type, texture, symbols, etc. are combined to convey a visual impression of the "personality" of the product.

Whether it is copy theme or a package design, the process of selecting the imagery is basically a matter of "coding information" in such a way as to make it capable of rapid transmission, and correct interpretation by the person to whom you are communicating. Whether we are aware of it or not, we use codes all the time — when we read "IBM" on a stock market ticker, for example, or call a next door neighbor by his nickname. Encoding an image message is the same thing, only it requires considerably more sensitivity to the connotations and hidden overtones of both words and symbols.

To go back to our earlier example, Hathaway could have chosen to say "quality" with words only. Or it might have shown pictures of the fabric, or a closeup of the fine needlework. Instead, it chose a unique approach and "encoded" the idea in a picture of a man with an eyepatch. And in so doing, Hathaway conveyed its quality message more memorably, and probably as fast, as a headline set in 48 pt. type.

Needless to say, the choice of the right image building device, or devices, is critical. In fact, we suspect that the reason most new products fail is not because they are "bad" products, per se,

WHAT IS IMAGE COMMUNICATION?

Remember the first Hathaway shirt ads . . . the man with the eyepatch? Of course you do. You probably can still close your eyes and "see" him — even describe him fairly accurately.

Now try to remember what the last ad for almost any "washday product" — Duz, Tide, Rinso, Dash — looked like, or what it said. Unless you make or market one of the above, chances are you will soon find yourself floundering. (One safe gambit: you can be pretty sure they all said "cleaner, whiter clothes").

What is so all-fired memorable about an eyepatch, and so non-memorable about soapsuds?

The answer is, of course, that the Hathaway man communicates in the most powerful way — by imagery. He is not just selling shirts. He is selling adventure, masculinity, gregariousness, omnipotence, social status, good taste. And so strong is this imagery that it is able to carry with it the idea that Hathaway shirts are for men who want to be all these things. And who doesn't? There's just enough "Walter Mitty" in each of us to make a positive response inevitable.

Image communication is nothing more than Elmer Wheeler's sound advice to "sell the sizzle, not the steak" brought up to date. Image communication, in fact, has been the basis of all good selling since Eve sold Adam on that shiny red apple. Today, as always, it remains the toughest job in all marketing. But done well, it is the most effective kind of selling there is.

How you go about it, and how well you succeed, requires at least an elementary knowledge of how ideas (and images) are communicated from one

TYPICAL COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

SEQUENCE

1

PRODUCT IDEA

2

PRODUCT IMAGERY ("ENCODING")

3

MEDIA SELECTION AND TRANSMISSION

COMPETITIVE COMMUNICATIONS (EXTERNAL "NOISE")

4

CONSUMER PICKUP

5

INTERPRETATION ("DECODING")

6

CONSUMER REACTION

but because of bad "image encoding."

Being human, we at L&M have had our fingers burned in this area of communication. In our considerably younger days, a client asked us to design a new package for a new silver polish in clear liquid form. We were told that the product would aim at the upper-class market of people with enough money to afford both expensive silverware and an expensive polish for it. So we put it into a handsome bottle, added a label which, in a high-styled, elegant, feminine manner, suggested that the product would be equally safe for milady's best Tiffany tea service, or milady's well-manicured hands. On the market the product was spectacularly unsuccessful — and one reason for its miserable performance was that both product idea and image encoding were wrong. Our design communicated the image of "safety" and "femininity" when it should probably have conveyed a far more forceful message — like say, "cleans your silver faster."

We know better today. We know, for instance, that image encoding, to be effective, must have an effective product idea to begin with. And today we and our clients not only have better market research, but our newest ally, design research, to help determine in advance what imagery will work best and, second, which of several design candidates will best communicate this imagery.

Even with the right product idea and the right encoding, the communications operation may break down if the wrong medium is chosen to transmit it. Advertising Chanel No. 5 in "Gobbles — The Voice of the Turkey Industry" would be an extreme case. So would advertising turkey de-lousing equipment in "Harper's Bazaar." Fortunately, thanks to present day market and media research techniques, the job of matching message-to-media-to-audience is seldom a problem.

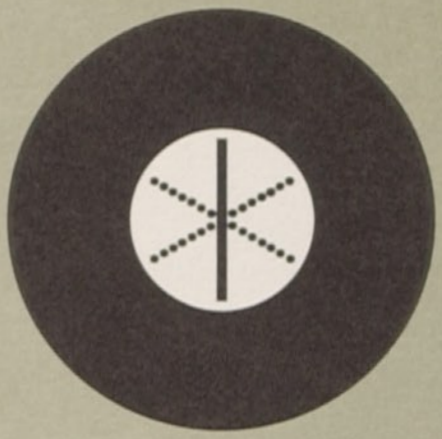
OVERCOMING OVERCOMMUNICATION

This does not mean that every transmitted message — even in the right medium — will be received. If anything is true about our lives, it is that we live in a world of constant "noise." Everybody, it seems, wants to tell — or sell — us something. We are surrounded daily by hundreds of brand names and thousands of sales arguments, in all media of communication. They compete for attention, interrupt each other, distract and confuse the mind. And since the human mind, like a telegraph cable, can only handle so many messages at any one time (1,180 brand names, according to one source) we tend to accept those we want to hear and reject those we don't.

Nowhere is this over-communication more apparent than in the case of TV commercials which assail the eye and ear with a rising cacophony of sound until, in desperation, the consumer resorts to his last defense short of belaboring his TV set with a hammer. He flips the off switch in his mind and sits there "seeing" without actually seeing, "hearing", without actually hearing . . . ends up remembering the show and forgetting your message. To check this try asking ten people to name the sponsors of, say Playhouse 90, or Garry Moore, or Perry Como, or in fact any show which does not indicate sponsorship in its title.

The problem, then, is to get your message through to your target in spite of all the "noise" going on around him. Since comprehension, like electricity, generally follows the line of least resistance, the *less effort* required to understand a given message, the *more effective* the communication is likely to be. Merely increasing the loudness of a commercial, or the size of a package, or the number of gadgets on a product in an attempt to outshout everybody else is no guarantee of more effective communication. It may simply annoy.

And once you have penetrated the "noise" there is the continuing problem of building deeper penetration, greater understanding and acceptability. This is no easy task, but it is one that can be vastly aided by keeping sales message and image communication consistent, year after year. Indeed, one good argu-



ment against the Great American Tradition of the yearly model change is that it forces the already overloaded consumer to "memorize", all over again, a whole new series of identifying design features.

On the audience side of the communication equation, your message comes in to the eyes, ears and other sense organs through the medium of a TV set, perhaps — or a radio, or the printed page of his magazine, or the design of the package. Sometimes all these things will be working effectively. Sometimes, however, the most clearly transmitted message will be received on a TV set with a weak picture tube at the height of the sunspot season being watched by a consumer with less than 20-20 vision holding a blonde on his lap. Naturally, the resultant reception will leave much to be desired.

LAST LAP: THE DECODING HURDLE

And even when the message is brilliantly conceived, masterfully "encoded" sent out on the right media, transmitted without undue external "noise", and flawlessly received, it has one more hurdle to jump: the consumer must interpret what you are trying to tell him *in the way you originally intended him to.* His "decoding", in short, must match your "encoding."

Here the communicator must face the fact that he can never hope to be 100% effective, 100% of the time. Different human beings inevitably will react in different ways to the same stimulus. For every hundred men who will interpret the color "red" to mean "warmth" there will always be eight who are color blind (or "color weak") and two who hate the color red anyway.

The final destination is the mind of your audience. And even when your message reaches this point, the job is not finished; it must produce a reaction of some kind.

The most obvious — and frequently forgotten — truth about marketing communication is that its goal is to influence people. Not to inform, or to entertain, or to elevate the morals, or to anything else. Simply to produce a pre-determined reaction — anything from an immediate "buy decision" to a "good-feeling" toward the product or the company — in the mind of the consumer.

CRITERIA FOR COMMUNICATORS

To sum up, there are three basic questions every communicator should ask himself about every message before he sends it:

First, is the product idea capable of easy "encoding" . . . capable of effective expression . . . capable of comprehension with a minimum of mental effort by the consumer? The general rule here is to make the communication as simple as possible. Emphasis on a single meaningful "message" — whether it be a copy claim or a design feature — is usually far more effective than trying to say a lot of things at once.

Second, is the idea relevant to your audience? That is, when your audience gets finished "decoding" it, will it still mean the same thing you had in mind when you "encoded" it? The rule in this case is to use those words and symbols which are most likely to be understood by your audience. In some cases this may require elementary symbolism and almost Basic English (if, for instance, your audience consists of all kinds of people, in all parts of the country). In other cases — for example where the audience is a homogenous group or class — the symbolism can be made more esoteric, and the copy more sophisticated.

Incidentally, since this is the area where most communications break down, it is comforting to know that it is also the area where good research can be most helpful. Research can do the all-important job of determining, in advance, what the "decoding system" of your audience is. And once this is known, you can choose those words and symbols which will not only be least likely to be misinterpreted but

which will have the most meaning — the most relevance — to the people who make up your audience.

Third question for communicators is does your message motivate favorably? The only rule we can offer here is that the communicator — and this includes designers as well as advertising and public relations communicators — must know in advance what kind of reaction he wants to get from the people he is talking to. Once he knows what his goal is, he can then, (if he is experienced and creative enough) combine in his image communication those elements which will be most likely to produce the reaction he is aiming for.

Now let's turn from the abstract to the concrete. Here are some examples which, like the Hathaway shirt example, may help to clarify the workings of image communications:

1

BRECK

1. THE BRECK GIRL

Chances are if you are a middle-aged male executive with a hairline working its way toward the nape of your neck, you are not a user of Breck shampoo.

But chances are you know about Breck. Who doesn't. It's been using the "Breck Girl" and the same "Beautiful Hair" slogan for years. Today it has about a quarter of the shampoo market, with the rest of the sales divided among dozens of other American shampoo makers.

Like the man in the Hathaway shirt, the Breck Girl is a fine image communicator. At times she is a child, suspended somewhere in that delightful, Alice-in-Wonderland world between infancy and adolescence. Other times she is shown as a young girl. Frequently she is portrayed as a mature woman who looks precisely as you would expect the little girl to look as a grown-up. Whatever her age, she has a classic loveliness, an ethereal kind of radiance and her hair is undeniably beautiful.

This is, of course, fantasy which is made all the more unreal by the softness of her coloring, the pastel haziness of her portrait. Is this kind of unreality out of place in the cold, realistic world

1946

Beautiful Hair

B R E C K

1959

Beautiful Hair

B R E C K

THERE ARE THREE BRECK SHAMPOOS FOR THREE DIFFERENT HAIR CONDITIONS

Hair may be styled many ways, but to be beautiful it must be soft and shining. The Breck Shampoo for your individual hair condition brings out the natural loveliness of your hair. One Breck Shampoo is for dry hair. Another Breck Shampoo is for oily hair. A third Breck Shampoo is for normal hair. A Breck Shampoo leaves your hair clean and shining.

Now packages matched with color help you select the correct Breck Shampoo.
■ *Red for dry hair* ■ *Yellow for oily hair* ■ *Blue for normal hair*

Enjoy Shirley Temple's Storybook over ABC-TV Network . . . Monday, May 18th. Longfellow's "Hiawatha"

of today? Sure it is. But faced with today's realities, what is more appealing than an escape into unreality — especially an escape that promises the eternal youth and beauty of the Breck girl.

The strength of Breck's image communications, however, goes beyond the "girl." It lies in the company's decision to keep her personality unchanged as the communicator for the product. Breck has resisted the urge (which at times must have been almost irresistible) to "make her modern" . . . to "add a little glamor" . . . to "jazz her up a bit." Wisely, the company and its advertising agency decided to leave the "sophisticated-glamor" image to its competitors. And the result is that Breck's image, today, remains unique while its competitors are reduced to attempts to out-glamor and out-claim each other.

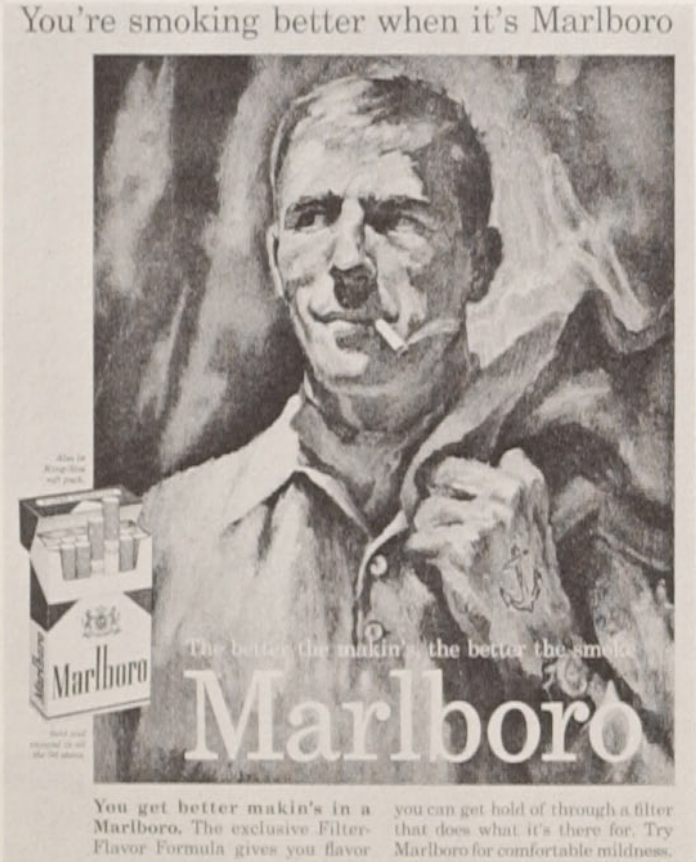
With Breck there is no confusion. The customer knows exactly what she is buying: Beautiful Hair. And she knows it because of a simple message, masterfully "encoded," and then repeated over and over again in the same way so she can never forget it.

2. THE MARLBORO MAN

From the moment he first appeared with tattoo emblazoned prominently on the back of his hand, the Marlboro Man was a cinch to be a trend-setter. Along with hair on the chest, bulging biceps and five-o'clock-shadow, a tattoo is one of the hallmarks of he-manity. But the tattoo is not alone; the face that goes with it is clearly that of a rugged "man's man." He is usually pictured in the kind of setting a man's man would be likely to be seen in. And what brand of cigarette does this man's man smoke? Why Marlboro, of course.

Hitting on the tattoo symbol to communicate a product image was a master stroke. A major American fear, currently, is that men are somehow going to lose their masculinity (a fear, we might add, shared about equally among men and women). The Marlboro man gives reassurance that everything is going to be all right, H-bomb testing and fallout radiation notwithstanding.

Unfortunately, lots of others got the same idea. Result: we now have the Chesterfield man (rugged, outdoor,


You're smoking better when it's Marlboro
Marlboro
Marlboro
You get better makin's in a Marlboro. The exclusive Filter-Flavor Formula gives you flavor you can get hold of through a filter that does what it's there for. Try Marlboro for comfortable mildness.

LEÇON FRANÇAISE DE L'AUTOMOBILE or,
how to make your driving fun again.
L'ÉCONOMIE: get up to 40 mpg; go on a week-end trip on one tankful of gas; use the savings to buy things you've been putting off!
Le Comfort: 4 doors for easy-out, easy-in
LE MANEUVRABILITE: scoot in, around, through and out of heavy traffic easily, turn effortlessly; only 155 inches (!) of car to park.
Le Dealer Network: over 800 coast-to-coast sales, service and parts headquarters, 150 more in Canada.
La BEAUTE: styled in Paris, made in France; six solid colors to choose from.
handsome contrasting upholstery.
Ferlac automatic clutch, both
LES EXTRAS: very sporty sliding sun-roof, optional.
LA GRANDE DIFFERENCE:
EVERYTHING YOU WANT IN A CAR
(INCLUDING A 7 CU. FT. TRUNK) AND YET ONLY $1645 POE N.Y.
Le Next Step?
Le Car Hot: RENAULT Dauphine

3

worker-type); the Camel man (ditto); the Viceroy Man (ditto, but with freedom of thought). And the masculinity message is now creeping over into beer ads, whisky ads, shaving ads and so forth. Communicating the same image in essentially the same way, they end up losing, not their masculinity, but their individuality. Except for his ever-present tattoo the Marlboro man is now indistinguishable from most of the other he-man image communicators. Fortunately, however, the tattoo symbol still keeps him unique, and helps Marlboro communicate its image message through all the competitive noise of the other like-looking, masculine-image-building men.

3. WORDS AS IMAGE BUILDERS

Image communication does not always depend on a symbol. Words can do the job effectively, if they are words that evoke a strong mental image.

In the automobile field, Renault's current campaign for its little "Dauphine" combines French and English words in gay and sprightly copy and inspired typography to communicate an image of smart sophistication. If you want to know what a Dauphine's compression ratio is, you'll have to look in the engineering specifications. The main idea the ads communicate is that driving a Dauphine is downright fun. And this image matches the longings of the young, modern, sophisticated people which the company has singled out as its sales target.

Rolls-Royce, on the other hand, used words — 751 of them — in a now-famous advertisement. It even went into detail about the fourteen coats of paint on top of five coats of primer hand rubbed between each coat; the rear window defrosting, and the self-lubricating system. In spite of the almost solid copy, readership was phenomenally high.

In this case, the image communication was already strong. As every millionaire knows, Rolls has been synonomous with quality for years. What the

ad did — and the reason, we suspect, for its high readership — was to give substance to the image by clothing the myth in facts. This can be dangerous. A myth is usually better left alone. In this case, however, the facts themselves were so fantastic, that, if anything, the image emerged stronger after reading the ad than before.

IMAGE COMMUNICATION THROUGH DESIGN

We have talked so often, and so vociferously about design as a means of communicating brand images (L&M's "Brandmark" booklet) and corporate images (Design Sense #13 and #14) that we hesitate to bring the subject up again. So rather than cite case histories, we would like to invite you to discover for yourself the power of design to communicate a specific image.

Here are five cigarette packages — and pictures of five different types of customers. It takes no great sensitivity toward design to see that each of the packages communicates a different kind of "personality" and represents, in effect, a different kind of market for the product.

Just for fun, try matching these packages to their most likely customers. Which one of the five kinds of people do you think would be most likely to smoke the cigarettes marketed in Package "A"? Which one would be likely to smoke those in Package "B"? And so on, right down the line.

When you have finished, check your answers against the list at the bottom of the page. We are willing to bet that in *at least* three out of the five cases, your choice will agree with the design panel which made the original matching.

Now go back and analyze your answers. Why did you pick the packages you did? Perhaps you will be able to put your reasons into words. More likely you will explain your choice by saying that the people and the packages just "looked right" together.

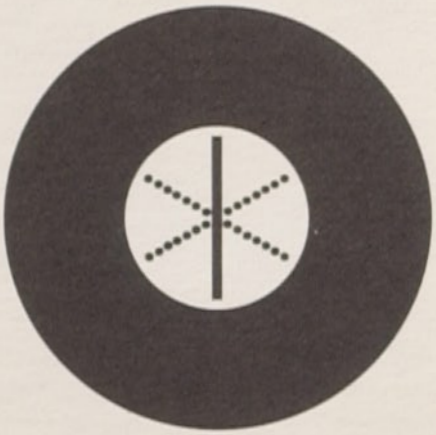
What you are really saying, of course, is that each package design communicates more than the name of the brand, and, more than an impression of the kind of cigarette (strong, mild, exotic, etc.) inside the package. Design also communicates, unmistakably, the "image" of the kind of person likely to buy and use the product. *In sum, design can help delineate a market.*

This has all sorts of implications for advertising and marketing men.

If it is true that design can appeal to specific kinds of people, then it becomes more than ever essential in this age of rising communication costs to make sure that design is integrated with all the other elements of your marketing "mix." Design must reinforce — and be reinforced by — advertising, *and* point-of-purchase promotion, *and* direct mail promotion, *and* publicity. All must work together, in their own ways, to communicate a consistent image.

When all these varied communicating elements have a single image as their common goal, the effect is like that of a symphony orchestra in which dozens of instruments, each with its own range capabilities and tonal qualities, combine to produce a single musical "image."

In the case of product and package marketing, however, the total integration of all communications brings the world's happiest music to the ears of corporate management; the gentle jingling of cash registers, the satisfied comments of millions of customers.



1

2

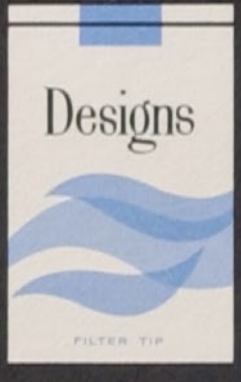
4

A

B

C

D



E

A	B	C	D	E

HOW TO MIRROR A MARKET

Like a woman's jewelry, or a man's wallet, a cigarette package is an intensely personal item. Carried, displayed and handled repeatedly during the course of a day, it becomes, in effect, a statement of the user's taste, a reflection of his personality.

Here are five fictional cigarette packages and five different "kinds" of customers. The game: match the packages to their most likely customers — i.e., which of the five people do you think would be likely to buy and carry cigarettes put up in package A? . . . in package B? . . . and so on.

Jot down your answers in the boxes above, then compare them with the pairings made by a panel of design, advertising, marketing and research people as shown in the upside-down section below. Chances are your selections will jibe with theirs in at least three out of the five cases.

What is true for cigarettes, is true in greater or less degree for everything we buy. Like human beings, packages and products have personalities too, and people tend to be attracted by design that seems to "fit" their personality, repelled by design that doesn't. Knowing this, today's marketing executive can use design as a tool to narrow his market or broaden it — in any of dozens of directions and degrees — according to the requirements of his particular product's marketing situation.

A—2; B—4; C—5; D—3; E—1

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L&M